

WYCOMBE Wanderers removed one of the main barriers between them and the Rothmans Isthmian League title on Tuesday night when they shattered Hendon with two second half goals by Tony Horsemann. This memorable triumph, watched by a 3,000 plus crowd, was achieved by sheer 100 per cent effort.

Every single player in a Wycombe shirt did his utmost to secure the three points — worth at least six on the night — and as a result they fought so determinedly, Hendon were never really in with a chance. They just had no hope of matching their opponents work rate.

Wanderers are now well out in front at the top of Division One, 12 points clear of Hendon and Bishop's Stortford although the latter could make up the deficit with games in hand. But the Blues have the points in the bag — so valuable when the pressure of three matches a week begins to tell.

If they produce the sort of form shown on Tuesday night for the remainder of the season, there can be little doubt the championship will be theirs. For this was a superb performance. The football at times was truly brilliant and if both goals had a touch of controversy about them, Hendon cannot deny Wycombe were worthy winners on points.

Although difficult to single out players from essentially a team performance, the midfield trio must be given the credit they deserve. It was here that Wycombe won the match. Skipper Larry Pritchard was an inspiration, prompting, harass-

ing and setting up numerous attacks at incredible speed. On several occasions he chased back sometimes over 20 yards when Hendon were in possession, recovered the ball and set up another Wycombe raid.

DELIGHTFUL

Terry Reardon, out of touch recently, chose this night to return to his top form, providing some delightful touches and excellent service to his front runners. Mick Hollifield, far more involved in the game than usual, made a string of timely interceptions and overshadowed, the experienced England International Rod Halder. Hendon's midfield trio had no answer and were often swamped by sheer determination.

But despite their midfield supremacy, the Blues still had to contend with the threat of Hendon's talented front three — Keiron Somers, Roger Connell and Johnny Baker. Wycombe's defence, which has shown definite signs of nerves in recent matches, never allowed them an inch of room to demonstrate their talents. Both full backs played it tight while the centre halves, Dave Bullock and Keith Mead, were unbeatable in the air, winning virtually everything.

Upfront, the ever improving Steve Perrin gave Welsh international Alan Phillips a thorough testing while Keith Searle and Tony Horsemann both produced some brilliant touches.

Hendon indeed looked a far cry from the team that drew 1-1 with F.A. Cup finalists Newcastle at St. James' Park and beat Wycombe 2-1 on their own ground earlier in the term. The departure of three key players to

By STUART EARP Wycombe Wanderers 2, Hendon 0

Enfield seemed to have left irreparable gaps.

Their defence showed remarkable resilience at times, thanks mainly to Phillips and Peter Deadman, but it seemed they could never match the sheer hard work of the home side. Only rarely did we see the fast, close passing skills that earned them the title last year.

From the third minute of the match, when goalkeeper John Maskell plucked Halder's free kick easily out of the air, the Blues must have realised this was their night. Maskell then dealt just as competently with a header and a long range effort from Hendon's most dangerous forward Baker.

Wanderers hit back almost immediately. After Pritchard had gone close, Swannell, the England goalkeeper, had to sprint out of his area to boot clear but Searle's challenge saw the ball deflected across to Pritchard. Wycombe's skipper fired in a powerful drive but Swannell was back on his line to take well.

Even at this early stage, Wycombe were looking clearly the better side, with more ideas upfront. Once a series of headed passes left Hendon completely forced but at the end of many Wycombe raids, the visitors were just able to scramble the ball away.

There were occasional lapses in the home defence, like when Baker was allowed a free header in the 32nd minute, but Hendon could never mount any sustained pressure on the home net and it was Wycombe who looked the more likely side to break the deadlock. Always attempting something different, they kept the champions stretched to the

limit but were often foiled when the final scoring pass went astray or was intercepted. It was just this that kept the scoresheet blank until half time.

Wycombe's dominance over the Hendon strikers, however, augured well for the second half. Somers and Connell, the former Walton spearhead, were rarely seen thanks to the home centre backs and eventually seemed to lose all interest in the game.

The vast majority of play after the break was centered on the Hendon goalmouth as Wycombe mounted attack after attack. Searle all but put them one up when he reached Phillips' weak back pass before Swannell but Dave Poole was on hand to clear the ball away.

After Mead had seen a goalbound shot blocked by Gary Hall, following Horsemann's corner, "Bodger" spurned the best chance of the game so far when Pritchard flicked the ball over the top of the defence. Swannell came out but Horsemann was there before him and got in a lob which sailed over the bar on the volley.

It came as no real surprise when Hendon substituted Connell in the 64th minute. Connell socks rolled down characteristically, had hardly been seen all evening. It must have been his quietest game against Wanderers for years.

In the 62nd minute Pritchard used all his speed to burst through a slow defence but his finishing shot was deflected. For a time it seemed Hendon might just hold on by the skin of their teeth.

Horsemann put an end to those thoughts after 65 minutes. The goal itself was not debatable but the

decision of referee Lewis, who had a fine game, to give Wanderers a free kick inside the Hendon box for obstruction, was extremely interesting. One often sees players getting away with obstruction near their own goal line, waiting for the ball to roll out of play. Phillips was shielding the ball from Pritchard, who also seemed to be pushed and the referee blew for the indirect free kick.

Twenty of the 22 players were inside the Hendon box — a good many of them in the six yard area. Reardon was on the ball and slipped it to Horsemann next to him. The angle was acute but made no difference to Bodger who sent a shot of real power into the top of the net — somehow missing the Hendon wall and the other players in the box. It was Tony's 40th goal of the season and his most vital of so far.

Before Hendon had a chance to settle again and think about a reply, Wycombe clinched the second killer goal. The score was given to Horsemann after the game but could have been awarded to one of three players. Only four minutes after the first goal, Birdseye sent over a deep free kick into the Hendon area. Swannell came out for the ball but Horsemann, in front of the goalkeeper, put him off to such an extent that it went through his hands and bounced into the net. Swannell protested to the referee, but to no avail. Mr. Lewis was right with play and said afterwards he thought the goalkeeper was hindered by one of his own defenders.

So Wanderers, beaten on the last four meetings against Hendon were 2-0 up. They had achieved their advantage with a far superior performance than

their opponents who by now looked well and truly beaten. Even Phillips was making errors, giving away two corners

needlessly. In all the Blues won ten flag kicks to Hendon's five. It could easily have been 3-0 in the 85th minute when Searle burst through again. Swannell came racing out of the area to smother the danger, meeting the ball a split second after Searle fired in his shot. It was a fine piece of goalkeeping. Seconds later, Horsemann went off to be replaced by Graham Mackenzie.

Only 60 seconds after leaving the substitute's bench, Mackenzie had the chance to put his name on the scoresheet with his very first kick of the game. A cross from the left, found him unmarked and with a split second to shoot but "Jock" screwed the chance just past the post from about 12 yards.

Haider provided one of Hendon's few attacking efforts in the second half when he made ground for a low drive which ran just wide but by then it was far too late. Hendon had been beaten by the better side and had no arguments about it.

At the end, the excellent Wycombe crowd, which did much to turn the game in Wanderers' favour, were deliciously chanting, "Bishop's Stortford here we come!". Who knows... with another performance like this, the title looks a good bet for Loakes Park.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell, P. Birdseye, K. Mead, D. Bullock, R. Grant, L. Pritchard, T. Reardon, M. Hollifield, A. Horsemann (sub G. Mackenzie 88 mins.), K. Searle, S. Perrin.

HENDON: J. Swannell, D. Poole, P. Deadman, A. Phillips, G. Hand, J. Wilson, R. Halder, M. Cooper, K. Somers, J. Baker, R. Connell (sub J. Wilcockham 64 mins.).

Referee: R. S. Lewis (Great Bookham).

Half-Time: 0-0. **Goalkeepers:** Wycombe, Horsemann 2 (65, 69).

Official paying attendance: 2,913. Approx total attendance: 3,500.